

SPEECH OF
HON. PETER A. DeFAZIO
OF OREGON
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2007

We are debating a simple, straightforward resolution. Clause 1 says, "Congress and the American people will continue to support and protect the members of the United States Armed Forces who are serving or who have served bravely and honorably in Iraq."

Every member of congress, Democrat or Republican, despite slanderous allegations from some on the Republican side, fully support our troops and want them to have the best equipment available to accomplish their mission.

The disagreement is over the strategy that determines their mission.

The Republicans don't want to have a debate over the strategy and are trying to conflate support for the troops with support for the president's failed stay the course strategy dressed up with a little dose of escalation.

But, as President Theodore Roosevelt said during World War I, standing by a president whether right or wrong "is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American public." He went on to say, "Patriotism means to stand by the country. It does not mean to stand by the president or any other public official." Supporting the troops does not require supporting the failed policies of this administration.

The Republicans do not want to debate the conduct of the war and the future strategy in Iraq.

Former House Intelligence Committee Chairman Peter Hoekstra and Rep. John Shadegg actually wrote a memo to their colleagues saying, "This debate should not be about the surge or its details.

This debate should not even be about the Iraq war to date, mistakes that have been made, or whether we can, or cannot, win militarily.

If we let Democrats force us into a debate on the surge or the current situation in Iraq, we lose.”

So there is a massive propaganda effort on the part of many Republicans to distract and dissemble. They have trotted out the tired and thoroughly discredited catch phrase that if we don't fight them there, we will have to fight them here, invoking the specter of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda. However, U.S. intelligence agencies, including military intelligence agencies, have refuted the claim that the conflict in Iraq is driven by al-Qaeda.

It is not.

The violence is driven by a civil war, primarily between Iraqi Sunnis and Shias and their 1,400 year old grievances.

The recent National Intelligence Estimate definitively put that issue to rest.

The Iraqi Sunnis and Shias have no interest in or capability to attack the United States.

Some in this debate have also made the ridiculous argument that if the U.S. leaves Iraq that somehow Osama bin Laden will take control and establish a safe haven for terrorists to attack the U.S. There is no chance that the Shias and Kurds, who represent around 80 percent of the population in Iraq, will allow Sunni foreign terrorist elements like al-Qaeda to take over the country. Even many Sunnis have grown tired of foreign terrorists operating in Iraq, with several Sunni tribes fighting al-Qaeda operatives.

Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda and their Taliban allies are still alive and active along the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan thanks to the Bush administration's massive diversion of troops and resources from Afghanistan to an unnecessary war in Iraq. We do need to reinforce our troops and allies in Afghanistan in order to end once and for all the threat posed by the al-Qaeda and Taliban leadership.

Our nation and our troops were led into the war in Iraq by the distortion of intelligence and dissembling by the president and senior members of his administration.

It is time for the truth. The Bush administration has saddled our troops with a failed strategy in Iraq. It is that failed strategy that hurts our troops, not the words of

those of us who have pointed out the obvious.

The administration blunders in Iraq are well-known. They went in with too few troops against the advice of military leaders like General Shinseki.

They disbanded the Iraqi army.

They failed to understand the ethnic tensions and power bases in Iraq.

They purged the Iraqi government of the bureaucratic experience necessary to have a functioning government, among others.

I do not believe there is any level of U.S. troops that could stabilize Iraq at this point and resolve the underlying ages old sectarian conflicts. The time when more troops might have made a lasting difference has come and gone.

There might be a small, temporary reduction in the chaos in Iraq, but the escalation will not solve the deep and underlying political conflicts that are preventing a long-term resolution to the violence.

The administration already increased the number of U.S. troops in Baghdad last summer in Operation Together Forward and has increased the number of troops throughout Iraq at other times as well, yet the violence against our troops and Iraqi security forces and civilians continues to increase. Short-term improvements in security in the wake of U.S. troop increases have always given way to the long-term trend of increased violence and a growing civil war.

Based on historical analysis, counterinsurgency experts, including General Petraeus, who is now the top U.S. General in Iraq but also recently rewrote the Army's counterinsurgency manual, estimate it takes around 20 U.S. troops per 1,000 inhabitants to successfully fight a counterinsurgency. To achieve that ratio in Baghdad alone would require 120,000 troops. Even with the increase proposed by the President, the U.S. would only have a third of that at best.

For all of Iraq, it would require 500,000 troops. General Shinseki's original estimate that it would take several hundred thousands troops to invade and stabilize Iraq was based on this counterinsurgency literature.

After the escalation we'll only have around 160,000.

The bottom line is that a proposal to increase U.S. troop levels in Baghdad or Iraq more generally by more than 20,000 is not a serious effort to restore stability to Iraq. As General John Abizaid, then the head of all U.S. forces in the Middle East, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee hearing on November 15, 2006, "I met with every divisional commander, General Casey, the core commander, General Dempsey, we all talked together. And I said, in your professional opinion, if we were to bring in more American Troops now, does it add considerably to our ability to achieve success in Iraq? And they all said no. And the reason is because we want the Iraqis to do more. It is easy for the Iraqis to rely upon to us do this work. I believe that more American forces prevent the Iraqis from doing more, from taking more responsibility for their own future." Essentially, the President is proposing to put more lives at risk with virtually no chance of changing the dynamic in Iraq.

The president remains optimistic. Optimism is not a strategy. Staying the course and repeating the failures of the past is not a new strategy.

Vice President Dick Cheney, despite the grim National Intelligence Estimate acknowledging the civil war in Iraq, dismissed suggestions that Iraq is a disaster, saying, "The reality on the ground is that we've made major progress."

Optimism, stay the course, delusion and denial do not serve our troops well. We need a real change in strategy.

A better strategy is to announce a timeline negotiated with the Iraqi government to bring our troops home over the next 6 months to a year. The administration has always set timelines for political developments in Iraq--for elections, for the drafting of the constitution etc. The administration argued such timelines were necessary to focus the energy of Iraq's leaders and to force compromises. We need to do the same on the military side.

Negotiating a timeline for bringing home U.S. troops with responsible parties in the Iraqi government would also boost the Iraqi government's legitimacy and claim to self-rule, and force the Iraqi government to take responsibility for itself and its citizens. Negotiating a withdrawal timeline and strategy with the Iraqi government could, more than possibly anything else, improve the standing of the Iraqi government in the eyes of its own people, a significant achievement in a region in which the standing of rulers and governments is generally low.

A timeline for bringing home our troops could also abate the insurgencies of both Sunnis and Shias. Too many Iraqis view our troops as an occupying force. Large majorities of both Sunnis and Shias want U.S. troops to withdraw and approve of attacks on our men and women in uniform.

As the Iraqi National Security Advisor, Mowaffak al-Rabaie wrote in the Washington Post on June 20, 2006, the removal of U.S. troops from Iraq, "will help the Iraqis who now see foreign troops as occupiers rather than the liberators they were meant to be. It will remove psychological barriers and the reason that many Iraqis joined the so-called resistance in the first place." He went on to write, "Moreover, the removal of foreign troops will legitimize Iraq's government in the eyes of its people...the drawdown of foreign troops will strengthen our fledgling government to last the full four years it is supposed to."

And, the U.S. must engage in robust diplomacy with all factions in Iraq, except the foreign terrorists and domestic al-Qaeda elements, and work with Iraq's neighbors in an effort to bring about political reconciliation among Sunnis, Shias, and Kurds.

Our troops have done all that has been asked of them in Iraq. Saddam Hussein is dead. His allies are on the run or in prison. The threat from WMDs in Iraq is nonexistent. The war that Congress authorized has been won. Our troops should come home. Congress did not authorize U.S. troops to referee a civil war in Iraq.